



Funding drug courts



When lawmakers saw how well drug courts are working to reduce addiction and save tax dollars, they voted unanimously for my bill to allow counties to use state drug-treatment funds to support local drug courts.

Counties urgently needed this funding flexibility to spare drug courts from the budget axe. In today's budget climate, it is essential to focus on the services that produce the most cost-effective results. Drug courts are a good example: By reducing crime and jail costs, they save taxpayers over \$4,000 per participant.

Welcome news on transportation

Long-awaited transportation projects will finally move forward. The \$7.5 billion transportation budget includes funding to help replace the damaged Alaskan Way Viaduct (with a tunnel) and the aging SR 520 floating bridge. Overall, federal stimulus funds and existing gas taxes will support more than 400 projects—and 39,000 much-needed jobs—across our state.



Key local concerns I raised were also addressed. We secured \$500,000 for a Lake Forest Park park and ride to help deal with potential traffic diversions resulting from SR 520 floating bridge tolls, and I'm very pleased that the transportation budget includes \$7 million for Shoreline's important SR 99 improvement project. To learn more about any of these issues, please visit wsdot.wa.gov.

Environment

I was disappointed we did not do more this year to protect our natural heritage and environmental future. In fact, natural resources funding was cut deeply. We did require the oil industry to fund a permanent rescue tug at Neah Bay. This will help us prevent an Exxon Valdez type disaster, and industry funding will save millions of dollars for taxpayers.

I am also pleased that we created new tax credits for renewable energy and passed Rep. Chase's bill to allow utilities to double the length of loans for solar energy and renewable energy projects. My biggest relief was that we saved Saint Edwards Park and the pool! A \$5 opt-out license fee averted park closures that had been threatened, and—thanks to effective community advocacy and good negotiations by the Parks Department—the pool that was closed in March was reopened on Memorial Day Weekend.





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2009

Legislative Wrap-up

Dear Neighbors:

The 2009 legislative session was the most difficult I've ever experienced. The global recession that has taken such a terrible toll on local jobs, businesses and family budgets also created the worst state budget crisis in over 50 years. Budget losses were so severe that we could not even protect funding levels for our top priorities, including education, health care, the environment, and services for children and families. You'll see more on the budget inside.

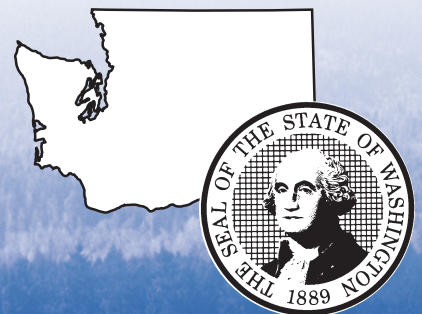
Even with the challenging budget situation, we made some progress on issues that matter to our district, such as helping the unemployed, redefining basic education, expanding rights and responsibilities for domestic partners, and regulating payday lending. These issues are also summarized inside.

Because of deep reductions to the Legislature's budget, this is the only newsletter I will send this year. I thought long and hard about even sending this newsletter. But I know many of you value these summaries, and you have a right to know what your Legislature is doing on issues that might affect you.

Please help me to keep in touch with you by visiting my web site and signing up for my legislative ememo. The emailed ememo is the lowest-cost way to share legislative news. I promise to guard the privacy of your email address and to only send real news. If you don't have email, let me know and I will find another way to keep you informed on key issues. As always, I welcome your questions and comments at any time.

Sincerely,

Rep. Ruth Kagi



Rep. Ruth Kagi

The Budget – Responsible Choices for a Historic Shortfall



The global recession that slammed into Washington last fall created the worst state budget crisis since the Great Depression. As needs grew and revenues shrank, the healthy \$850 million budget surplus we saved last spring plunged into a multi-billion dollar deficit by January. It is hard to convey the anguish I felt as

services I had fought to obtain for schools, children and families were slashed because we had to balance the budget.

I was willing to ask the public for a small temporary increase in taxes to cushion the budget blows to basic services, but there was not enough support to put the question on the ballot. The result was, with few exceptions, an “all cuts” budget. To this day, many citizens do not realize how deeply we cut state spending. For example, the budget:

- Requires layoffs or furloughs for thousands of state-paid employees.
- Freezes salaries for everyone who gets a state paycheck, including teachers.
- Cuts most funding for I-728 class-size reduction.
- Cuts health care spending by \$770 million, including 40,000 enrollments from the Basic Health Plan.
- Cuts higher education funding by \$503 million and allows tuition hikes of up to 14 percent for 4-year colleges and up to 7 percent for 2-year colleges in each of the next two years.
- Reduces funding for natural resources by \$93 million.

There were few consolations. We secured a commitment to restore funding rates for teacher COLAs and class-size reduction by 2014. We largely preserved, though at lower levels, important safety-net services for vulnerable children, families and seniors. And we helped college students by streamlining financial aid. Without President Obama’s federal funding (about \$2.7 billion), the losses would truly have been catastrophic.

By and large, I think we made responsible choices, given the historic size of the budget shortfall. But they were agonizing choices that will cause real pain to teachers and others who deserve better. We have a duty to set things right as soon as our economy recovers.

Redefining Basic Education

This year’s horrific cuts to I-728 class-size funding, I-732 teacher COLAs, teacher planning days and other state support for schools proved in the most painful way why we need constitutional guarantees of more state funding for schools. All our hopes for the future of our children and our state depend on education. That is why it was essential to pass an education reform that updates and expands the definition of constitutionally protected “basic education” funding.

Some people thought this reform bill (HB 2661) implied a criticism of teachers, because it creates a framework to increase accountability for successful results. In fact, however, this reform puts in law the systems and support teachers need to do their jobs and be fairly compensated.

A new approach to child welfare

Being the chair of the National Conference of State Legislatures’ Human Services Committee has helped me to see how Washington is a national leader in using evidence-based best practices to improve human services. We continued our work this session to enact innovative reforms based on good research.

This year, we took another major step forward by enacting reforms that will use performance-based contracts to improve services to children and families in the child welfare system. These reforms, which I sponsored, give DSHS 18 months to convert some 1,800 existing child-welfare system contracts into performance contracts that reward improved results—and not merely caseload sizes.

The reforms also set up demonstration regions where private-sector contractors will provide a full range of child-welfare services, including case-management services. A study will compare results in these regions to results in areas where case management is still provided by DSHS. Importantly, savings from reduced caseloads will be reinvested into prevention and intervention services that reduce the need for, or duration of, out-of-home placements of children.

We learned last year that expanding evidence-based programs in child-welfare services could produce long-term net benefits of between \$317 and \$493 million, including up to \$62 million of net taxpayer benefits.





Among many highlights, it will:

- Redefine basic education to include guaranteed state funding for 24 high school credits and/or six classes per day.
- Require any future state mandates on schools to be funded.
- Define a process for developing clear and sufficient formulas that fund "prototype schools" that are much more transparent and understandable to the public – and to legislators.
- Direct the Professional Educator Standards Board to work with teachers to create realistic performance standards for teachers.
- Begin development of a new teacher-salary model to improve pay and ensure it is in line with certification requirements and comparable pay for other professionals in the community.



My heartfelt thanks go out to the Washington State PTA for awarding me its highest honor—the Friend of Children Award. (l-r) State PTA President Laura Bay, National PTA president Jan Harp Domene, and Education Policy Analyst Mary Kenfield joined me in celebrating the award.

Funding to implement this new education model remains our biggest challenge. Over the coming year, we will work to identify a dedicated funding source for basic education that can be adopted by the Legislature, and accepted by the voters.

Regretfully, the Governor vetoed a section of the bill that included pre-school for at-risk children. Although this is a huge disappointment, the Governor tasked the Director of the Department of Early Learning and the Superintendent of OSPI to bring a bill back next session to address the early learning needs of all children. I look forward to working on this effort in the coming months.

- When fully implemented by 2018, this historic reform will reduce class sizes and mandate much-improved state funding for functions ranging from professional development to special education. Most important, building these improvements into the definition of "basic education" will ensure they are guaranteed by our state constitution. Education is too vital to put at the mercy of economic cycles.

New Highway Safety Reforms

The Highway Safety Reforms I wrote in 2007 to improve trucking safety are



Gov. Gregoire and I confer at the signing of my Highway Safety Reform.

working. In fact, they are working so well that the State Patrol, Washington Trucking Association and others asked me to expand the reforms to cover aeroporters, solid-waste haulers, moving vans, excursion buses and other commercial vehicles that are regulated by the Utility and Transportation Commission.

The law will reduce deaths and injuries by helping the State Patrol to track high-risk carriers in a database and shut down unsafe vehicles and operators until problems are fixed.

As the Chair of the Senate Transportation

Committee said recently about my 2007 law, "You never know whose lives you save,

but we know it has saved lives."

Other session highlights ...

Fair domestic partnerships. I fully supported expanding Washington's domestic partnership laws to include all the rights and responsibilities the state confers on married couples. This will not alter marriage laws. It will—rightly and justly—end discrimination against gay couples in insurance, employment, finances, health care and other areas.



Bigger unemployment checks. To help struggling families and propel economic recovery, we temporarily raised minimum weekly unemployment benefits to \$200 and boosted other payments by \$45 a week. Federal help will boost weekly benefits an additional \$25 for the rest of the year. Businesses will also gain: A 5 percent cut to unemployment taxes will save employers about \$377 million over the next five years.

Payday lending reform. The Fair Loan Act of 2009 reflects years of trying to pass basic protections for payday loan borrowers. The modest reform limits the total number of high-interest loans that can be issued to a borrower and requires realistic repayment times and installment plans for defaulters.

School safety. Students will be safer because we made it easier to track down and dismiss school employees who commit serious crimes. The Washington Education Association strongly supported the changes, saying that if a person is convicted of one of these crimes "we along with society do not want them in our public school system."